

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 *Corinthians* 10:3-6)

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Romans 2:13 and the Jealousy Narrative Part 1 by Timothy F. Kauffman

Former Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) minister and erstwhile Reformer, Jason Stellman, recently celebrated his second year since converting to Roman Catholicism, a conversion due in no small part to the Roman Catholic exegesis of *Romans* 2:13, “the doers of the law shall be justified.”¹ N. T. Wright, an Anglican minister and proponent of the “New Perspective on Paul,” uses this same verse to conclude that “Justification, at the last, will be on the basis of performance.”² When Norm Shepherd taught at Westminster Theological Seminary, he proposed *Thirty-Four Theses* on justification, of which his 20th relied on a similar reading of *Romans* 2:13: “The Pauline affirmation in *Romans* 2:13, ‘the doers of the Law will be justified,’ is not to be understood hypothetically in the sense that there are no persons who fall into that class, but in the sense that faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ will be justified (Compare Luke 3:21; James 1:22-25).”³ Rich Lusk, of Federal Vision notoriety, insists as well, “we find the Bible teaching that future justification is according to works. Final justification is to the (faithful) doers of the

law.”⁴ Of course, Lusk argues, this does not overturn justification by faith—rather it enhances it, for justification is by faith. It is “speaking of initial justification,” Lusk says, “[b]ut it is indisputable that the biblical data on final justification brings works into the picture.” “Jesus is not kidding or messing around,” Lusk continues, “when he speaks of a future justification according to our words (Mt. 12:37; 25:31ff).”⁵

Whether it be Romanism, Shepherdism, Wright’s “New Perspective,” or Lusk’s “Federal Vision,” there is a constant siren song of works righteousness coming from outside the doors of the Church, attempting to convince the sheep to plead their own righteousness before God for their final justification. Because Lusk is a former PCA minister, and in fact made the above case while he was still in the PCA, his is on the surface a compelling case, and he claims to reason as a Reformer might, saying, “But what happened to using Scripture to interpret Scripture? Why not plug into Rom. 2 the people that Scripture says elsewhere did (or kept) the law? That makes far more sense than filling in Paul’s terms with our own notions of what ‘doing the law’ might entail.”⁶

Lusk then proceeds to reason not as a Reformer, but as a Roman Catholic, claiming that “The standard will be soft and generous” on Judgment Day, “because God is merciful” and “will judge us as a Father and Husband, not as a cold, aloof Sovereign,” and “will use ‘fatherly justice’ in the final judgment, not ‘absolute justice.’”⁷ Because his

¹ Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), “The Journey Home” with Marcus Grodi (December 9, 2013, Jason Stellman, guest). Retrieved January 8, 2014 (42:00-46:00) from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bC_cjqjTRAk. See also, his *Conversion Testimony*, delivered at the 2013 Holy Family Conference in Kirkland, Washington (March 9, 2013). Retrieved December 23, 2014 (22:00) from <http://www.calledtocommunion.com/media/Holy%20Family%20Conference%20-%20Conversion%20Story.mp3>.

² N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 440.

³ Norman Shepherd, *Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works*, 1978. Retrieved August 19, 2014 from <http://www.hornes.org/theologia/norman-shepherd/the-34-theses>.

⁴ Rich Lusk, *Future Justification and Doers of the Law*, 2003. Retrieved August 19, 2014 from <http://www.hornes.org/theologia/rich-lusk/future-justification-to-the-doers-of-the-law>.

⁵ Lusk, 2003.

⁶ Lusk, 2003.

⁷ Lusk, 2003.

attempts to lower God's standard of righteousness are indistinguishable from Rome's, we put Lusk in the same category as Jason Stellman. Lusk is merely a Roman Catholic in Presbyterian clothing (he is now a member of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches—CREC), but we nevertheless agree with his insistence that Scripture must be used to interpret Scripture. His use of the interpretive principle, however, has not prevented him from filling in Paul's terms with his "own notions of what 'doing the law' might entail." To correct Lusk, and to correct Wright, Stellman, and Shepherd as well, we shall use Scripture to interpret Scripture, and shall not only use Paul to interpret Paul, but also use Jesus to interpret Paul, and Moses and the Prophets to interpret Paul, for it is from them that Paul learned the Gospel that he was teaching to the Gentile congregation at Rome. In the process we shall see that Lusk, Wright, Shepherd, and Stellman have all overlooked Paul's own explanation of how *Romans* 2:13 is to be read. *Romans*, as we shall see, is to be read *jealously*.

What we find in our analysis of Scripture is a consistent narrative from Moses to Paul in which the Jews are driven to jealousy by the transference of what were ostensibly Jewish blessings to Gentile recipients. We will focus particularly on Paul's use of Ezekiel because both Jesus and Paul rely heavily on Ezekiel to criticize the Jews. They both incite Jewish jealousy by teaching that the promises of God to the descendants of Abraham have been lavished on the Gentiles. Among those promises are a new heart, a new spirit, and along with them, obedience to the Law: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (*Ezekiel* 36:25, 25).

Once Paul establishes that the Gentiles have new hearts, a new spirit, and now "walk in my statutes," he then insists that these "doers of the law" will be justified by faith alone. Paul's message in *Romans* 2:13 is not that the "doers of the Law will be justified" based on their works, but rather that it is the Gentiles, not the Jews, who have the new heart, the new spirit, and with it, true obedience that shows them to be the true descendants of Abraham (*Romans* 2). It is these *spiritual* descendants of Abraham, not his *physical* descendants, who will be justified by faith alone (*Romans* 3). Once we can see *Romans* 2 in the light of the groundwork Ezekiel laid, *the Jealousy Narrative* will then serve to contextualize other passages of Scripture that Lusk, Wright, Shepherd, and Stellman also use to support their hypothesis that our final justification will be based on our personal righteousness and our performance. In the end, Paul condemns justification by works as a different gospel, and insists that the justification of those who have a new heart, a new spirit, and now "walk in my statutes, and...

keep my judgments, and do them" is by faith alone and is under no circumstances based on the works of the law.

The Jealousy Narrative in Romans

Let us now sit at Paul's feet and learn from him why he wrote the letter to the Romans in the first place. His explicit purpose in writing the epistle is to make his fellow countrymen jealous: "salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.... For I speak to you Gentiles.... If by any means I may provoke to emulation [jealousy] them which are my flesh, and might save some of them" (*Romans* 11:12-14). Paul is writing to make the Jews jealous, and he does so by saying that "salvation is come to the Gentiles." Jealousy, or what may be called *the Jealousy Narrative*, therefore is the lens through which *Romans*, and in particular *Romans* 2:13, must be read.

Let us therefore go all the way back to Moses, and the rampant disobedience and unbelief of the Israelites who had "provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods," and "with abominations provoked they Him to anger" (*Deuteronomy* 32:16). Because they had provoked God by their unbelief and disobedience, Moses prophesied that God would one day do the same to them, stirring them to jealousy by a believing, obedient people:

And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. (*Deuteronomy* 32:20-21)

In *Romans* 10:19, Paul reveals to the Jews what is clear to the casual reader of *Deuteronomy*: that "foolish nation" which "are no people" refers to the Gentiles. It is by no coincidence that Paul begins the epistle by commending the Gentiles in Rome because their "faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (*Romans* 1:8), and ends by saying that their "obedience is come abroad unto all men" (*Romans* 16:19). They are the truly circumcised ones (*Romans* 2:29)—they are the true Jews, the promised descendants of Abraham, the people of God who both believe and obey. The Jews on the other hand, are portrayed as disobedient, unbelieving, and uncircumcised (*Romans* 2:24-25)—they are the true Gentiles, and are no descendants of Abraham at all. This is the core of *the Jealousy Narrative* and *Romans* cannot be fully understood apart from it.

We note for example that Paul describes all of the benefits the Jews had as God's people: "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;

Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (*Romans* 9:4-5). Before he completes his epistle, he has moved each blessing into the Gentile column: adoption (8:15); glory (9:23); covenants (11:25-27); law (2:14); service (12:1); promises (4:13); fathers (4:14, 9:7-14); and ethnic relation to Christ (4:16, 9:8).

The *coup de grâce* occurs in *Romans* 10:6-8 when Paul appropriates Moses’ Valedictory Speech (*Deuteronomy* 30:11-14) and tells the Jews that *Moses had preached the righteousness of faith to them long ago*—a righteousness which the Gentiles now possess, and which the Jews do not. We provide Moses’ words, and Paul’s adaptation of them, to illustrate how Paul incited Jewish jealousy:

Moses: For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, *that we may hear it, and do it?* Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, *that we may hear it, and do it?* But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. (*Deuteronomy* 30:11-14)

Paul: For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach. (*Romans* 10:5-8)

Right where the Jews expected to be justified by the Law, Paul has inserted faith. Where the Law says, “the man which doeth those things shall live by them,” Paul substitutes a righteousness that is from Christ. Thus Paul ends his *Jealousy Narrative* in *Romans* 10, insisting that by seeking a righteousness based on the law, the Jews *still have not even obeyed Moses*: “But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?” (*Romans* 10:16; compare *Isaiah* 51:1). That is to say, they have not obeyed (as the Gentiles have) Moses’ commandment to believe (as the Gentiles have) in Jesus (*Deuteronomy* 18:5). Clearly as a student both of the Scripture and of Christ Himself, Paul was aware of the ancient pedigree of *the Jealousy Narrative*, for it was ever present throughout the Old Testament and in the preaching ministry of Jesus. To discover this, we will examine several cases of *the Jealousy Narrative* in the Old Testament, focusing on those used so well by Jesus and by Paul in the New.

The Jealousy Narrative in the Old Testament

Although there are many examples of *the Jealousy Narrative* in the Old Testament, we will focus only on seven that Jesus and Paul invoked in their application of the narrative in their teaching ministries. Their use of these Old Testament illustrations will serve us well as we show where Lusk, Wright, Shepherd, and Stellman all went wrong.

The Queen of Sheba (*1 Kings* 10)

When the Queen of Sheba met Solomon, she was initially resistant to the truth, but when she witnessed his wisdom, his house, his wealth, “and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her” (*1 Kings* 10:5). She was undone. “It was a true report that I heard.... Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: ... Blessed be the LORD thy God...because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice” (*1 Kings* 10:6-9). The Queen of Sheba was a Gentile, yet she believed, and repented of her unbelief.

The Widow of Sidon (*1 Kings* 17)

During the drought in Israel, the prophet Elijah had been receiving his sustenance at the brook Cherith. When the brook dried up for lack of rain, the Lord sent him to Sidon to “dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (*1 Kings* 17:9). Notably, when Elijah commanded the widow to give him the last of her food, he assured her that the Lord had promised to provide, and she believed His promise, giving him her last “handful of meal...and a little oil” (*1 Kings* 17:12-15). The widow was a Gentile. She believed, and obeyed.

Naaman the Syrian (*2 Kings* 5)

Naaman was a Syrian general, “a great man with his master, and honourable...he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper” (*2 Kings* 5:1). His wife’s Jewish servant girl knew there was a prophet in Samaria, and that Naaman’s only hope was to seek him out. Naaman sought Elisha, and initially refused to dip himself seven times in the Jordan, but his servants persuaded him do as the prophet instructed. When Naaman emerged from the river without leprosy, he concluded, “Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel” (*2 Kings* 5:15), and thenceforth desired to worship the Lord alone (*2 Kings* 5:17-19). Naaman was a Gentile leper. He believed, and obeyed.

The Ninevites (*Jonah* 3)

When Jonah was commanded to preach to the Ninevites, he initially demurred, but when persuaded by events ordained by God, he went to Nineveh (*Jonah* 1-2). Despite Jonah’s misgivings, “the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid

his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes” (*Jonah* 3:5-9). The Ninevites were Gentiles, yet they believed and repented.

Hosea’s Children, Loruhamah and Loammi (*Hosea* 1:1-2:23)

When the Lord told Hosea, “Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms” (1:2), he married Gomer, and the two children of Gomer became the metaphors both of God’s rejection of Israel and of His election of Gentiles. The first child was called “Loruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away” (1:6). The second child was called “Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God” (1:9). Nevertheless, even though Israel had been cut off, her children would be beyond numbering, “and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God...and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God” (1:10, 2:23). Paul would later explain that this signifies the ingrafting of the Gentiles (*Romans* 9:25-26), and by this means, “all Israel shall be saved” (*Romans* 11:26).

The Gentiles and Samaritans of *Ezekiel*

We will now spend more than a little time with *Ezekiel* because his development of *the Narrative* is so significant to our understanding of *the Jealousy Narrative* in the *Gospels* and in Paul. As we shall see, *Ezekiel* is the foundation upon which Paul constructs his arguments in *Romans* 2.

Jerusalem’s Sisters (*Ezekiel* 16)

When the Lord spoke to unfaithful, disobedient Israel, He told them they were children of Gentiles: “thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite” (*Ezekiel* 16:3). That was an insult on its own, but before *Ezekiel* was finished, the Lord had made Israel the middle sister between two of the worst possible siblings the Jews could imagine: “thine elder sister is Samaria...and thy younger sister...is Sodom” (*Ezekiel* 16:46). Samaria was known for her idols (*Isaiah* 10:10-11) and Sodom was known for her homosexuality (*Genesis* 19:4-5), and Israel was now their near relation. Not only was Israel in a bad family, she was so wicked that she made Sodom and Samaria look good by comparison. Israel had looked down upon her “sisters” in judgment, but in truth she was worse than they—so much worse that she had “justified” them both:

[T]hou hast multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done. Thou also, which hast judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they:

they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters. (*Ezekiel* 16:51-52)

As unfaithful as Israel was, the Lord was not unfaithful to His covenant, and promised that He would cause Israel to remember her ways and be ashamed, and that He would accomplish this in a most unusual way—He would give Samaria and Sodom back to Israel *as daughters*:

Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, *when thou shalt receive thy sisters*, thine elder and thy younger: *and I will give them unto thee for daughters*, but not by thy covenant. (*Ezekiel* 16:60-61)

The significance of this within the context of *the Jealousy Narrative* is that God provoked the Jews to jealousy in the Old Testament by portraying them as worse than the worst Gentiles imaginable, and promised that He would provoke them further *by including her wicked sisters in the new covenant*—something both Jesus and Paul would one day expound upon in the New Testament.

“Make you a new heart and a new spirit” (*Ezekiel* 18-33)

The Jealousy Narrative is further advanced in *Ezekiel* 18 through 33, when God tells the Jews that the sins of the wicked will not accrue to them in judgment if they repent, and that the “righteousness” of the self-righteous will not accrue to them in acquittal:

But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes... *All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him*: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.... But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth.... *All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned....* (18:21-24)

When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, *all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered*; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it... But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. (33:13, 19)

It is this warning that so fanned the flames of Jewish jealousy in the Old Testament. The sinner could repent, and all of his wickedness would not be counted against him? Yet if the “righteous” committed sins, not one good work would accrue to him to offset the deficit? Unthinkable! The

response of the Jews to Ezekiel would one day echo throughout the pages of the New Testament: “That’s not fair!” It was, at its core, an indictment of Jewish self-righteousness.

It must also be noted that the context of *Ezekiel* is the Jewish claim to the right to Abraham’s inheritance based on genealogy alone. The land was expected to be theirs based on their genetic relationship to him (11:15; 33:24), and in “pride” and “haughtiness,” they were trusting in their own “beauty” and their own righteousness (16:15, 50, 56; 33:13), looking down on sinners (16:51) even while they themselves had “committed abomination” (16:50; 18:12; 22:11). Ezekiel justifiably responds that they are lawbreakers, and will by no means inherit the land on account of their relationship to Abraham (33:25, 26). Instead of claiming relation to Abraham, they ought rather to bring forth the fruit of repentance (14:6, 18:30). This sequence is quite familiar to us as it is the basis of so many rebukes of the Jews in the New Testament. They claimed to be Abraham’s descendants, but were lawbreakers at heart. John warns that they ought to bring forth the fruit of repentance, rather than “say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father” (*Matthew* 3:8-9; *Luke* 3:8). Jesus has this similarly terse response: “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (*John* 8:39). Paul agrees: “They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God” (*Romans* 9:8).

It is in this context that we also see in *Ezekiel* the precursor to Jesus’ rebuke of the Jews that “they say, and do not” (*Matthew* 23:3), and Paul’s warning that the Jews are not doers of the Law, but are hearers only (*Romans* 2:13), and James’ admonition, “be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (*James* 1:22). The Jews in Ezekiel’s day were as deceived as they were in Jesus’ day:

[T]hey sit before thee as My people, *and they hear thy words, but they will not do them*: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: *for they hear thy words, but they do them not.* (*Ezekiel* 33:31, 32)

The message that resounds throughout the Old Testament and New is that the Jews “honourest Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me” (*Matthew* 15:7-8). The only solution for such a condition is translation from death to life through rebirth and the indwelling of the Spirit, and that is precisely what the Lord prescribed for His people in *Ezekiel* 18: “Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have

transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (verses 30, 31).

The result of such a heart change would have had two beneficial effects: the self-righteous would stop resting on his own righteousness, and the wicked would turn from his wickedness, or in a word, *repentance*. In *Ezekiel* 18 and 33, the Lord thrice warned the righteous that they must not trust in their own righteousness (18:24, 33:12-13). To cease trusting in their own righteousness, however, would require new hearts. In the same chapters He thrice comforted the wicked that if they would turn from their sins, none of their wickedness would accrue to them in judgment (18:21-22, 33:12-15), but to turn from wickedness would require a new heart.

This, of course, was not what the Jews were expecting at all, for it is not the wicked only but the self-“righteous” too, who are commanded to repent. What was being commanded to both the wicked and the self-“righteous” was regeneration, for *both* stood in dire need of it: “turn yourselves from all your transgressions...and make you a new heart and a new spirit.” In this exchange in *Ezekiel* we see a foreshadowing of Christ’s interaction with the Pharisees and Publicans. Just as the Pharisees would one day reject the offer in the New Testament—because it “unfairly” acquitted the sinner—the Jews rejected the command in the Old Testament, and on the same grounds—*because it was unfair*: “Yet ye say, *The way of the Lord is not equal*.... Yet saith the house of Israel, *The way of the Lord is not equal*” (18:25, 29). “Yet the children of thy people say, *The way of the Lord is not equal*.... Yet ye say, *The way of the Lord is not equal*” (33:17, 20).

What was “unfair” in the minds of the Jews was that all their hard work would not accrue to offset their sins if they *did not* repent, and neither would the sins of the wicked accrue in judgment if they *did*. Even now we can hear the early laborers as they murmur against the householder, “Thou hast made them equal unto us!” (*Matthew* 20:12); and the Jews as they respond to Paul incredulously, “What advantage then hath the Jew?” (*Romans* 3:1); and the elder brother who is indignant that “thou hast killed...the fatted calf” for “this son of yours,” but never allowed so much as a “kid” in return for “these many years” of service (*Luke* 15:29-30). To the self-righteous, God’s gracious acquittal of the sinner is always “unfair.”

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you” (*Ezekiel* 36)

What we find in *Ezekiel* 36 is the ultimate end of God’s command to “make you a new heart and a new spirit.” The natural man is completely unable to comply with such a command, and because neither the self-“righteous” nor the wicked are able to fashion new hearts and new spirits for

themselves, the Lord promised that He would do it for them:

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. (36:26-28)

What would one day deeply offend the sensibilities of the Jews is that this promise of a new heart and a new spirit had been lavished upon the Gentiles. Both Jesus and Paul apply these verses to the Gentiles as *the Jealousy Narrative* is worked out in the New Testament. They both continuously put forth not the Jews but the harlots, publicans, lepers, Samaritans, and Gentiles as the recipients of this promise—the regenerated, Spirit-indwelt, sons of Abraham who will inherit the land, and who are, incidentally, better at obeying the Law than the Scribes and Pharisees. To see this, we need only examine Jesus’ application of *the Jealousy Narrative* in the *Gospels*.

The Jealousy Narrative in the Gospels

In one of the most dramatic displays of *the Jealousy Narrative*, Jesus reads from *Isaiah* in the synagogue, and concludes by saying, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” Those who heard Him bore witness to Him and marveled “at the gracious words” He spoke (*Luke* 4:21-22). Everything seemed to be progressing nicely, but then He invoked *the Jealousy Narrative* by reminding them of Naaman the Syrian and Zarephath, the widow of Sidon. There had been no shortage of *Jewish* widows in Elijah’s day, but Elijah went to help the *Gentile* widow of Sidon instead. There had been no shortage of *Jewish* lepers in Elisha’s day, but Elisha went to help the *Gentile* Naaman instead (*Luke* 4:25-27). Jesus elicited the expected response, and His audience erupted in a jealous rage. Those who heard Him “were filled with wrath” and tried to drive Him out of town and throw him off a cliff (*Luke* 4:28-29). He had made them jealous by showing that God’s blessings—to which the *Jews* believed they were entitled—were being lavished upon the *Gentiles*, and had been for a very long time. Other New Testament examples abound:

When He healed the ten lepers, the only one who returned to thank him was a Samaritan, not a Jew, and Jesus made a point of it: “There are not found that returned to give glory to God, *save this stranger*” (*Luke* 17:12-19).

When He taught the Parable of the Two Sons (*Matthew* 21:28-31), the purpose was to show that “the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before” the chief

priests and the elders. The publicans and harlots “did the will of his father,” but the elders and priests did not.

When he encountered a believing Roman centurion (*Mathew* 8:5-10), He marveled, “Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, *no, not in Israel*.” He then turned to the Jews and informed them that this Roman occupier would “sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” as if he were a Jew, but the Jews “would be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” as if they were Gentiles (*Matthew* 8:11-12).

When Simon the Pharisee had Jesus in his home for dinner, Jesus showed that a repentant prostitute was better than a Pharisee at obeying the law to love God (*Luke* 7:40-50).

When He taught the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the point was that the Samaritan knew better than the Jewish priests and Levites how to obey the law to “love thy neighbour” (*Luke* 10:30-37).

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (*Luke* 15), the older son (the scribes and Pharisees) is provoked to jealousy by the gracious treatment of the younger son (the sinners and tax collectors). The father in the parable uses his elder son’s jealousy as an occasion to invite him to join the feast.

In the Parable of the Laborers (*Matthew* 20), the early laborers (Jews) are made jealous by the compensation received by the late workers (Gentiles). The householder uses their jealousy as an occasion to proclaim God’s freedom to save both Jew and Gentile, according to His sovereign will.

In the Parable of the Householder’s Vineyard, “the kingdom of God shall be taken from you [the Jews], and given to a nation [the Gentiles] bringing forth the fruits thereof [obedience]” (*Matthew* 21:33-43).

In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (*Luke* 18:10-14), a tax collector goes home justified, but the Pharisee does not.

In Jesus’ visit with Zacchaeus (*Luke* 19), it is a repentant, obedient tax collector who is identified as the true “son of Abraham.”

In *Luke* 11, Jesus insists that the Gentile Queen of Sheba would one day “rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation [of Jews], and condemn them” (31), and promised that the Gentile Ninevites would “rise up in the judgment with this generation [of Jews], and shall condemn it” (32).

When he taught the Parable of the Sower, it is in the context of His comparison of the Jews, whose “heart is waxed gross” (*Matthew* 13:15), to His followers who

received His teachings “in an honest and good heart” (*Luke* 8:15).

Jesus clearly invested a great deal of His time making the Jews jealous by portraying believing Gentiles as if they were the chosen people of God, and portraying unbelieving Jews as if they were Gentiles. The sinners, tax collectors, harlots, lepers, Samaritans, and Gentiles—even the Roman occupiers—are better than the Jews at everything: glorifying God, loving God, loving their neighbor, repenting, obeying the law, and importantly, *believing in Jesus*.

While we do not deny that all the attributes of a believer are certainly resident in each of Jesus’ examples—the leper, the harlot, the Samaritan, the centurion, Zacchaeus and the Tax Collector—we must not miss that Jesus has represented the ideal Jew *in their aggregation*:

The harlot...	... loved God more than the Pharisee.
The Samaritan...	... loved his neighbor better than the priests and Levites.
The centurion...	... believed in Jesus and would dine with Abraham...	... more than Israel... ... but the Jews would not.
The Samaritan leper...	... glorified God more than the Jews.
Zacchaeus...	... was a son of Abraham in contrast with the Pharisees.
The tax collector...	... was justified and the Pharisee was not.

And what an aggregation it is! This is what it looks like both to hear and to do the law, to believe in God and glorify Him, to be a true son of Abraham, and inherit the kingdom of heaven. It is these, not the Jews, who have received the promised regeneration. It is these to whom the promise of God is fulfilled, “A new heart also will I give you.... And I will put my spirit within you, *and cause you to walk in my statutes*” (*Ezekiel* 36:26-27). It is by these that the promise of Moses is fulfilled, that God would stir the Jews to jealousy with “a foolish nation” who “are not a people.”

This “Nexus of Jewishness”—centered as it is on Samaritans, Gentiles, publicans, harlots, and lepers—is the object of the Pharisees’ scorn throughout the *Gospels*, and not without cause. It is *the Jealousy Narrative* in full force, and it had a very specific purpose: to make the Jews jealous that they may be saved. The fact that His preaching

occasionally netted a Pharisee (*John* 3, 7:50, 19:39) is evidence that Jesus’ *Jealousy Narrative* had its intended effect. As we shall see, His apostles learned this well from Him, and applied it with considerable success in the book of *Acts* as well.

The Jealousy Narrative in Acts

When the Apostles began to take their message to the world, they carried *the Jealousy Narrative* with them. The effect was the same. When Paul and Barnabas preached in Antioch in Pisidia, it was the Gentiles who were interested in his message (*Acts* 13:42), and when they came out in numbers, Jewish jealousy kicked in: “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, *they were filled with envy*, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming” (*Acts* 13:45). When Paul and Barnabas saw their response, they doubled down, trying even harder to provoke the Jews to jealousy:

Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, *lo, we turn to the Gentiles....*” And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. (13:46-50)

When Paul and Silas preached in Thessalonica, it was the Gentiles who believed—“the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few” (*Acts* 17:4)—and it had the intended effect: “But the Jews which believed not, *moved with envy*, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people” (17:5). When Paul said of the Jews that their ears, eyes and hearts were closed, he invoked *the Jealousy Narrative* again, and once again it had the desired effect: “Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning [disputation] among themselves” (*Acts* 28:28-29).

The effectiveness of the Narrative is seen when the Jews depart from the synagogue after Paul preaches the Gospel, but the Gentiles remain and insist that he come back the following Sabbath to preach again (*Acts* 13:42). After “the congregation was broken up,” the Jews, who were apparently waiting curiously, “followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God” (13:43). The Jews eventually “expelled them

out of their coasts” (13:50), but at the Jewish synagogue at Iconium, the same method is applied, and “a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed” (14:1).

With this backdrop of *the Jealousy Narrative* in the Old Testament, *Gospels*, *Acts*, and *Romans*, we will now turn our attention to Paul’s precise use of *the Narrative* in *Romans 2*.

The Jealousy Narrative in Romans 2

In *Romans 2*, we necessarily divide the chapter into two parts, *Romans 2:1-16* and *Romans 2:17-29*, for so Paul himself divides the chapter. The latter half is merely a recapitulation of the former. In the first half, Paul begins by challenging the self-righteous hypocrisy of the Jews “for thou that judgest doest the same things” (2:1) “after thy hardness and impenitent heart” (2:5). He ends with the Gentiles, not the Jews, doing “the things contained in the law” (2:14), by their obedience showing that it is they, not the Jews, who have “the law written in their hearts” (2:15). It is the Gentiles, not the Jews, who have a new heart and a new Spirit, in accordance with the covenant promise in *Ezekiel 36:26*.

In the second half, Paul doubles down on *the Jealousy Narrative*. He repeats the charge against the Jew who “retest in the Law” (2:17) and “makest thy boast of the law” (2:23), and yet continues to disobey it (2:21-25). It is the Gentiles, on the other hand, who are uncircumcised “by nature,” and yet “keep the righteousness of the law” (2:26) and “fulfil the law” (2:27). It is the Gentiles, not the Jews, who by the Spirit, are obeying the Law, in accordance with the covenant promise in *Ezekiel 36:27*.

In this light, it is clear that Paul in *Romans 2* is applying with his typical rigor the implications of *the Jealousy Narrative*. He is juxtaposing Jews and Gentiles in the pattern established by his Master. Jesus had the Gentiles rising in judgment to condemn the Jews for their disobedience (*Matthew 12:41, 42*), and Paul follows suit: “And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?” (*Romans 2:27*).

Thus, in light of the vast amount of Scriptural data from Moses, the Prophets, the *Gospels* and *Acts*, it is difficult to see *Romans 2* in any other light than that of *the Jealousy Narrative* that God has superimposed on the history of His people. There is no better catalyst for Jewish jealousy than for the Law and the circumcision to be given to those who “by nature” have neither, and in this, Paul has made plain that the covenant promises of God have been manifested in the Gentiles: “A new heart also will I give you.... And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them”

(*Ezekiel 36:26-27*). In both halves of *Romans 2*, it is the Jews who are portrayed as having hard, impenitent, uncircumcised, disobedient hearts (2:5, 25), while the wicked Gentiles who had been portrayed in such unflattering detail in *Romans 1* are portrayed with tender, repentant, circumcised, obedient hearts, with the Law inscribed upon them (2:15, 28, 29). It is these believing Gentiles who rise like the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites to judge the disobedient Jews (2:27). As we shall demonstrate, in each half of chapter 2 Paul’s approach is resonant of what he learned by reading *Ezekiel* and by hearing the words of his Lord (*Galatians 1:12*).

The Jealousy Narrative in Romans 2:1-16

We notice from the beginning of the chapter Paul’s heavy reliance on *Ezekiel* as he compares Israel to her idolatrous elder sister Samaria and to her sexually deviant younger sister Sodom (*Ezekiel 16:46*). Israel, *Ezekiel* said, was so disobedient, that by comparison she had “justified” her sisters. In this pitiable condition Israel had presumed to stand in judgment of her sisters even though she herself was guilty of the same things: “bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they” (*Ezekiel 16:52*). In *Romans 1* Paul has set up the same comparison. He has portrayed the Gentiles as wholly given over to idolatry and sexual deviancy just as Samaria and Sodom had been, for the Gentiles “changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image” (1:23), and “burned in their lust one toward another; men with men” (1:27). These are the Samaritans and Sodomites—Israel’s elder and younger sisters—and the Jews of Paul’s day continued to stand in judgment of them.

At this point, Paul invokes *the Jealousy Narrative*, just as *Ezekiel* had: as the Gentiles “are without excuse” (*Romans 1:20*), so too are the Jews inexcusable, for even as they look down upon Gentiles and Samaritans in judgment, they are guilty of the same offenses (*Romans 2:1-3*). This is *Ezekiel*’s tune, and Paul is singing with him on the refrain, for Paul has essentially restated *Ezekiel 16* for the Jews of his day. Paul continues in *Romans 2:4-6*, reminding the Jews of God’s forbearance in His command to repent in *Ezekiel 18-33*: “Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin” (18:30). “[T]urn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (33:11). Echoing *Ezekiel*, Paul asks, “despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (*Romans 2:4*).

Part 2 will conclude in the next edition of The Trinity Review.